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ABSTRACT

Under pressures of increased demands for public accountability and decreased resources, the State University System of Florida has responded by fusing existing program review procedures with accountability reporting. The State University System began program review in the mid-1970s and found it most valuable internally for the individual universities and their governing boards particularly in advocating for faculty and students needs. By contrast, accountability reporting for the entire system began in 1991 at the behest of the state legislature with an adversarial thrust stemming from a core sense that faculty were not working hard enough. An original 50 accountability measures were eventually streamlined to 9 objectives and a resulting merger of review and accountability reporting has resulted in less paperwork and reporting and the opportunity to merge quantitative outcome indicators with process-oriented qualitative measures of excellence leading to an enfranchisement of all stakeholders. The program review has shifted emphasis from one of enhancing quality and programmatic offerings in a political climate favorable to higher education to quality assurance under diminishing resources, demands for increased access, and increased societal criticism of higher education and to ways to bring about these changes while protecting the integrity of academic programs. Overall, program review offers the significant advantage of addressing accountability concerns in a responsible manner that takes into account the complexities of academic programs. An appendix lists the original 50 accountability measures. (JB)

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THE NEXUS BETWEEN ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROGRAM REVIEW

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THE NEXUS BETWEEN ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROGRAM REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Accountability, a national and even international phenomenon, has become synonymous with the process of attempting to ensure that universities are wise users of tax dollars. It has gone hand in hand with a decrease both in resources and in a general trust in the higher education system. Program review predates the recent interest in accountability, and is itself enjoying a resurgence of interest. It is natural that states would look toward utilizing already existing program review processes for accountability purposes. This paper will discuss the fusion of program review procedures and accountability reporting, the emergence of 50 measures which were initially used for accountability reporting in a major State University System, and the evolutive streamlining of both the procedures and the criteria for accountability reporting.

There is no indication that accountability is anything other than here to stay, and the extent to which funding to higher education may, over time, be restored or increased will depend in part on how universities and systems respond to this new level of scrutiny. Those universities which take a proactive, leadership role will likely fare better than those which are being dragged all the way to the same inevitable table.

More importantly, the public's long-standing trust in education has seen an erosion unequaled in recent history. It may be through accountability and the measures subordinated under

that name that this trust will be restored. Academic program reviews, already in existence in many states, could provide a powerful tool for certain facets of accountability, taking it beyond purely quantitative data to a richer portrait of the performance and effectiveness of an institution's academic units.

PROGRAM REVIEW: Background

The State University System of Florida's (SUS) reliance on academic program review is longstanding. The SUS began exploring the possibilities of conducting program reviews with the hiring of a new Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs in the mid 1970's. Subsequently, the first cyclic program reviews were initiated in 1975 with the intention that, eventually, all academic programs would be reviewed, at which time the cycle would begin anew. This has occurred. All disciplines in the SUS have enjoyed this scrutiny, with the greater majority having been reviewed a second or even a third time via a peer review process that sees ten to twelve reviews in progress at any given time within the nine universities comprising the SUS. In 1983, program review activities were formally placed into law.

It is important to note several important characteristics which distinguish the program review process as it is conceived, "marketed," and implemented in the SUS from other review procedures. First, however far-reaching the distribution of printed program review reports, it was clear from the outset that their value was highest internally, that is, within the confines of the various working relationships of the individual

universities and their single governing board. As such, program reviews served and continue to serve in the dual capacity of a quality control mechanism, but, as importantly, as a major informational source with respect to existing activities and, significantly, the aspirations of the universities to create new academic degree programs, institutes and centers, organizational units including departments, schools, and colleges; as well as termination of activities and, finally, other curricular issues which, from time to time, came before the purview of the governing body. The distinction between informational and purely evaluative motive is important to understand in this context.

Secondly, and due in large part to its peer review methodology, program review was marketed and understood to be, if swaying in any one direction, in the direction of an advocacy position, particularly for faculty and students. Program reviews were seen as a forum for making known to the central administration of individual universities as well as to the governing board the various resource needs in the form of more faculty, equipment, dollars for assitantships and faculty development. Moreover, the process served to demonstrate the performance of relevant research and service, both activities of which have been difficult to describe to constituents external to the academic community.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Background

By contrast, accountability reporting for the System began in 1991 not at the behest of the governing board itself but,

rather, directly from the legislature as it attempted to scrutinize the use of public dollars by public agencies. Unlike the program review process, accountability has, from the outset, had an almost adversarial thrust as opposed to the advocacy positions of program reviews. This has stemmed from a core notion of accountability with respect to higher education in Florida, namely, that faculty are not working hard enough.

In 1994, accountability and program review were merged into a single conceptual framework to be driven by the Master Plan goals of the SUS (the SUS Master Plan establishes five-year goals for the system of ten universities). The fusion of program review and accountability must be preceded by a thoughtful conceptual analysis of the two activities because it entails the merging of a process which has primarily been a tool for quality improvement initiated by academicians (i.e. program review), and a process which is primarily a tool for evaluating the use of tax dollars initiated by the public and legislators (i.e. accountability). The credibility of both program review and accountability in the eyes of academia, legislators, and tax payers must be maintained.

After an initial year in which accountability measures listed in statute were reported on, members of the academic community expanded the process to encompass 50 accountability measures which were to provide the legislature with an assurance that the complexity of activities on SUS campuses were effective and accountable (a summary of the 50 measures appears in the Appendix). This proved to be unworkable and, in general,

ineffective for the simple reason that the 50 measures were predicated on the notion of "telling our story" to the legislature, when, in fact, the legislature was not interested in the story of academia; rather, the focus of the legislature was on a series of clearly articulated "heartburn" issues which were physically, politically, and economically distressing to both the legislative body as well as to the individual universities and the SUS as a whole.

Consequently, the 50 measures have now evolved toward a more streamlined association to the original intent of the legislature. It is hoped that this streamlining will make the entire process more negotiable. The final accountability objectives which have been settled on are listed below.

One: Increase or maintain a high level of undergraduate teaching productivity by state funded ranked faculty, while maintaining or reducing average class size.

Two: Meet planned enrollment.

Three: Increase access to state universities.

Four: Increase undergraduate retention and graduation rates

Five: Streamline progression to baccalaureate degree.

Six: Increase undergraduate degree productivity.

Seven: Increase Research productivity.

Eight: Increase Service Productivity

Nine: Increase Institutional Support from External Sources

The endeavors of program review and accountability, refined

over time, have provided the SUS with the experiential and conceptual framework with which to merge the processes into a seamless strategic planning and evaluative procedure which has resulted in less and not more paperwork and reporting, and the opportunity to merge quantitative outcome indicators with process-oriented qualitative measures of excellence. This merger has been instrumental in the enfranchisement of all stakeholder, from legislators to faculty.

The SUS' procedures for program review, its accountability measures, and its organizational infrastructure are capable of informing similar strategies both at system as well as at institutional levels.

Purposes of Program Review

Program reviews became widely used as quality assurance activities in the United States beginning in the 1970's (Bogue and Saunders, 1992). The following examples of definitions of program review provide a sense of the general purposes of such reviews: "... a comprehensive evaluation of a curriculum leading to a degree. This review will ordinarily involve the acquisition of historic, current, and projective data on program purpose, resources used and needed, and an evaluation of performance" (Bogue and Saunders, 1992, p. 138); "...evaluation of programs already in existence" with the objectives being to generally focus on program improvement and efficiency (Barak, 1982, p. 93-94); and "the process of defining, collecting, and analyzing information about an existing program or noninstructional unit to

arrive at a judgment about the continuation, modification, enhancement, or termination of the program or unit" (Conrad and Wilson, 1985, p. 10).

A study conducted by Moon-Hee Lee (1991), on the purposes of program review in the 39 states which conduct statewide program reviews, found that the purpose most frequently identified was that of assessing and enhancing program quality. Although increasing efficiency and effectiveness of resources, providing optimum service and access, and eliminating costly duplication of programs were cited as purposes of program review, they were identified much less frequently than the purpose of assessing and enhancing program quality. The program reviews in the SUS reflected these national trends. While efficiency and avoiding duplication were traditional components of SUS program reviews, the main purpose was to evaluate and enhance the quality of the programs.

Program Review Checklist

The program reviews in the SUS employ both quantitative and qualitative evaluation procedures to capture the rich complexity of academic programs and reflect that complexity in the recommendations which result from program reviews. The SUS utilizes a peer review model with external consultants who are experts in the disciplines under review. Prior to the site visits, the consultants are provided a generic outline of programmatic points to address. The points on the outline are the result of 20 years of SUS experience with program reviews,

and have been found to yield good coverage of all major components of academic programs. The major headings on the Checklist comprise four general sections: Program, Faculty, Students, and Facilities and Resources. The Checklist appears in Figure 1.

Shifting the Focus of Program Review to Incorporate Accountability Concerns

As the public demands for accountability in higher education have increased, and the legislative requirements for accountability have become urgent, the SUS program reviews have begun a shift in focus.

The context in which program reviews in the SUS are conducted has changed from one of enhancing quality and increasing programmatic offerings, in a political and economic atmosphere that was relatively favorable to higher education in the 1970's and 1980's, to a context of quality assurance in an atmosphere of diminishing resources, demands for increased access, and increased societal criticism of higher education. An underlying issue for program review today is how to enhance quality and be accountable to the public. In Florida, and across the nation, it has become evident that the public's most pressing concerns are not the traditional concerns of quality as understood by higher education. They are less concerned with the quality of the faculty, curricula, equipment, and other resources. Their main concern is that universities should focus on undergraduate teaching and learning. "Their issue is whether

FIGURE 1

Program Review Checklist		REMARKS
PROGRAM		
Depth, breadth, and currency of curriculum		
Programs properly sequenced		
Appropriate number of credit hours to BA/BS degrees		
Adequate availability of courses		
Appropriate community college articulation		
Appropriateness of Limited Access, if applicable		
Appropriate use of advisory boards		
Linkage with relevant institutes and centers		
Accreditation status		
Distance learning activities		
Pending programmatic modifications		

Summary/Overview

Program Review Checklist		REMARKS
STUDENTS		
Appropriate admission standards		
Appropriate number of majors		
Appropriate retention and graduation rates		
Passing rates on licensure examinations, if applicable		
Adequate number of teaching assistantships		
Adequate teaching assistant stipends		
Graduate Placement; Graduate/employer satisfaction		
Provision of clubs, societies, etc. in discipline		
Adequate advising services		
Appropriate distribution by race and gender		
Summary/Overview		

Program Review Checklist		REMARKS
FACULTY		
Appropriate distribution by age, rank, gender, and race		
Quality of departmental leadership		
Quality of teaching		
Quality of scholarship and publication		
Appropriate contributions by Eminent Scholars		
Internal cooperation		
External linkages		
Budgetary provision for faculty development		
Salaries		

Summary/Overview

Program Review Checklist		REMARKS
FACILITIES AND RESOURCES		
Faculty office space		
Teaching assistant office space		
Classroom space		
Laboratory space		
Provision of student/faculty commons room		
Departmental Conference Room		
Adequate clinical facilities		
Equipment		
Adequate office expense budget		
Appropriate number of support personnel		
Summary/Overview		

the institutions are **doing the right things**, not whether they are in the traditional sense **doing things right**." (NCHEMS, 1994)

An important role for program review has become one of identifying ways to bring about demanded changes in a manner that, where possible, protects the integrity of academic programs. These demands, usually from the State legislature, are reflected in the accountability measures discussed earlier. They include decreasing the credit hours required for degree programs, increasing the undergraduate teaching productivity of faculty, and increasing access to more students, without proportional increases in resources.

One means of visualizing the interaction between program review and accountability is through the framework presented in Figure 2. Accountability issues which focus on universitywide data, or which can be explored through readily available quantitative measures are, at least initially, generally addressed directly through the accountability process. However, when both quantitative and/or qualitative measures, and programmatic information are called for, or the quantitative measures in the accountability process reveal a problem that could be illuminated by qualitative review by experts in a discipline, the issue is taken up in the program review process. For example, an accountability measure might reveal that licensure pass rates in a particular discipline are low. Program review could explore the program-specific reasons for the low scores, recommend a course of action, and legitimize the concern and recommendations in the eyes of the faculty, through the

FIGURE 2

ACCOUNTABILITY CONCERN
IS QUANTITATIVE DATA SUFFICIENT ?
YES
NO
ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURE & REPORT
ADDRESS IN PROGRAM REVIEW
DISTILL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS; REPORT FOR ACCOUNTABILITY
REVEALS AN AREA WHICH NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
IF NECESSARY, FEED BACK INTO PROGRAM REVIEW FOR RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO IMPROVE

involvement of respected peer reviewers in their discipline.

The SUS program review checklist, because of its comprehensiveness, is still a good tool for program reviews, and the SUS will continue to address all points on the checklist because they provide a holistic portrait of the program, rather than an unbalanced view that is only responsive to the vicissitudes of legislative concerns on accountability. However, certain items on the checklist will receive greater attention, or a different focus, than had been the case previously. Examples of areas of increased emphasis in program review, resulting from accountability concerns, follow.

Faculty Teaching Productivity. For each program under review, central questions include: How can faculty teaching productivity, particularly at the undergraduate level, be increased? Is the level of teaching appropriate to the mission of the university? i.e. universities in the system whose primary mission is teaching would have different expectations for undergraduate teaching productivity than the Research I universities (according to the Carnegie classification). Are there faculty who are not very productive in research who could teach more courses? The universities in the SUS are increasingly providing variable distribution of effort for teaching and research, whereby those whose strengths lie in research may teach fewer courses than those whose strengths lie in teaching. The SUS is also undergoing a major review of tenure criteria, providing more emphasis on teaching than they had before. The move to increase faculty teaching must necessarily go hand in

hand with changes in the reward structure which recognizes teaching.

Student Retention and Graduation Rates. Program reviews will provide greater scrutiny of retention and graduation rates for programs, and attempt to identify strategies for improving low rates.

Student Advising and Other Academic Support. The efficacy of student advising in decreasing excess credit hours taken by students (i.e. credit hours that are not required for graduation), and the provision of adequate academic support to promote student retention and graduation will be examined.

Credit Hours to Degree and Beyond Degree. Program review will examine how these credit hours may be decreased where necessary, with minimal impact on the academic quality of the program. Programs which can reasonably be offered within 120 semester hours will be decreased to that level, and those which must exceed 120 will be justified, in keeping with a recent legislative requirement.

Student Performance on Licensure Examinations. Prominent among the outcomes measures in which legislators have expressed an interest are passage rates on licensure examinations. Program reviews are sensitive to this, and provide information on how pass rates in the program reviewed compare to national averages. In the absence of such comparisons and other considerations specific to each discipline, the pass rates alone can be misleading. Where improvements are needed, the reviews also suggest means of improving the rates.

Faculty Research and Service. Increasingly, the question on program reviews will be whether faculty are conducting significant research and whether faculty service rendered is indeed an appropriate application of disciplinary expertise to benefit the university community or the local community. In other words, do the activities in these two areas merit the expenditure of State funds?

External Resources. The health of academic programs in some universities increasingly will depend on the ability of the programs to generate external resources. Program reviews, where appropriate, will evaluate the faculties' competitiveness in garnering external funds, and may recommend avenues for increasing external resources.

Viability of Programs and Selectivity in Initiating New Programs. The termination of academic programs has traditionally not been a major part of the agenda for program reviews in the SUS. In part, this was designed to allay faculty fears regarding reviews, and encourage them to be full participants in the reviews and the implementation of recommendations. As resources diminish and the demands for accountability from constituencies external to higher education become more strident, program productivity is coming under increased scrutiny. Program reviews will need to address, to a greater extent than in the past, the viability of programs identified, through data analysis, as having "low productivity." In regard to the initiation of new degree programs, program reviews have always played an important role. Now that greater selectivity needs to be exerted in

initiating new programs, the evaluation of a university's ability to mount a program of high quality will become even more rigorous.

IV. Conclusion

Much of the public debate on higher education today centers around accountability. How well institutions of higher education address the concerns of the public through accountability will, to a great extent, determine future public support. Program reviews, which many institutions already have in place, and several institutions are now initiating, offer a means of addressing some of the concerns in regard to accountability without more duplicative activities.

Program review offers the significant advantage of addressing accountability concerns in a responsible manner that takes into account the complexities of academic programs. This is particularly important to preserve the integrity of higher education within the context of accountability, because accountability issues are often framed by those not familiar with higher education, and tend to use simple, quantitative measures. While there is little doubt that higher education will need to take difficult steps to address the accountability concerns voiced by the public and legislators, we must ensure that those steps will have the intended outcomes, and benefit students and society both in the short and long term. Program reviews are a tool which can bring quantitative and qualitative measures, and some of the best minds in each academic discipline, to bear upon

this challenging task.

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Appendix

Fifty Accountability Measures, 1994

State University System of Florida

Measure	Subject/Performance Measure
1	Student Surveys: Quality of Instruction.
2	Departmental Initiatives for Improving Teaching
3	Provisions for Faculty Development.
4	Results of Attempts at Accreditation.
5	Licensure Passing Rates.
6	Employer Surveys: Satisfaction with Graduates.
7	Programs to Promote Computer Literacy.
8	Increase of First Time In College Enrollments.
9	Increase Number of Minority Scholars.
10	Increase Alternative admits Retention and Graduation.
11	Increase Minority and Women Enrollments If Under-represented.
12	Keep Degree Programs to 120-128 Credit hours to Degree.
13	Provide Courses Based on Demand.
14	Twelve Contact Hour Production.
15	Graduation Rates of Athletes the Same as for All Students.
16	Meet Planned Enrollment Levels.
17	Increase % of Full-time Students Graduating in Four Years.
18	Reduce Number of Limited Access Degree Programs.
19	Increase % of Full-time CC Transfers Graduating in Two Years.
20	Increase Retention Rates.
21	Number and Type of Retention programs.
22	Provide Stable Source of State Funding to SUS.
23	Receive Funding to Improve Faculty Salaries by 10%.
24	Establish Differential Fees for Purposes of Flexibility.
25	Review Priorities Through Resource and Productivity Model.

Planning Directive One:
Improve the Quality of Undergraduate Education

Planning Directive Two:
Provide Adequate Access to Undergraduate Education

Planning Directive Three:
Establish a Stable, Reliable Source of State Funding

Measure	Subject/Format/Remarks
26	Develop Creative and Cost Saving Programs.
27	Achieve SUS Average of 27 FTE in Graduate Programs.
28	Increase Distance Education Activities
29	Improve Computer & Telecommunications Systems.
30	Increase Number of Minority Law Students.
31	Increase Interest in Teaching as a Profession.
32	Increase Faculty Involved in Public Schools.
33	Increase School District Personnel Involved in SUS.
34	Share In-service Training With Public Schools
35	Research Agenda in Cooperation With Public Schools.
36	Improve Student Assessment in Public Schools.
37	Gear Teacher Training Programs Toward Blueprint 2000.
38	Increase Primary Care Physicians from Medical Schools.
39	Increase Production of Nurses.
40	Increase Production of Allied Health Graduates.
41	Produce Quality Scholarship in Areas Critical to Florida.
42	Provide Public Service in Critical Areas.
43	Increase Contract and Grant Income.
44	Increase Private Funding.
45	Compete for Fed. Defense Conversion Tech. Awards.
46	Increase Library Collections.
47	Expand Use of Technology in SUS Libraries.
48	Increase Library Funding to Comparable Institutions.,
49	Survey: Student Satisfaction with Advising.
50	Increase Usefulness of Technologically-based Advising.

Planning Directive Four:
Develop and Implement Creative and Innovative Cost-saving Programs to Increase Efficiency without Sacrificing Quality

Planning Directive Five:
Solve Critical Problems in a Rapidly Growing State.

Planning Directive Six:
Forge Public/Priate Partnerships to Help Achieve State Goals

Planning Directive Seven:
Improve the Quality of the Libraries

Planning Directive Eight:
Provide Quality Student Advising